

Indian Heights Park Steering Committee

Report to the Park Board Commissioners

October 2011

Indian Heights Park is one of 120 designated parks in the Rochester Park System. This 36.4 acre park is located in the 5th Ward at 1800 Terracewood Drive NW. It is primarily undeveloped, mostly wooded, with some trails used by hikers and some mountain bike riding. The park land was purchased in 1973 as a way to preserve the remaining wild area in northwest Rochester and over time minimal development has occurred in the park. In October of 2009 a proposal was presented to the Park Board to expand mountain biking trails in the park. There were public objections to this plan and the Park Board heard feedback from many in May, June & July of 2010. The mountain bike trail proposal became more complex when it was noted that the land near or in the park was a burial site for some Native Americans in the mid 1850's. At the Park Board meetings in July, August, & September the Board approved the formation of a Steering Committee to review the issues and develop a long range plan for Indian Heights Park. This document is the report of this Steering Committee for consideration by the Rochester Board of Park Commissioners.

Formal Charge - From the Board minutes "to review the purpose of the park and develop an overarching plan for the use of the park."

- To review & document the history of Indian Heights Park - IHP;
- To conduct & oversee an archeological assessment of IHP;
- To develop options for the use of IHP;
- To evaluate these options and determine the most appropriate for IHP;
- To establish a multi-year development plan for IHP;
- To recommend a long term use plan for IHP to the Rochester Park Board.

Steering Committee Membership -

Dave Beal - Community Member

Nora Dooley - Board of Park Commissioners - 1st Ward;

Dawn Littleton - Friends of Indian Heights;

Mitch Moore - Friends of Indian Heights;

Larry Mortensen - Board of Park Commissioners - 5th Ward;

Jeff Robertson - Rochester Active Sports Club;

Denny Stotz - Assistant Director of Park & Recreation;

Ron Bastian - Director of Park & Recreation;

Jim Wilson - Native American Center of Southeastern Minnesota.

Steering Committee Process -

The Steering Committee began meeting in November 2010 and has continued to meet twice each month since January of 2011. The group has taken a number of specific steps to complete the charge. The steps included a series of fact finding sessions; a brainstorming exercise; and a recommendation development process leading to the recommendations presented here in this report. All meetings were open to the public and included an open comment period.

The fact finding step involved gaining a number of perspectives regarding the park and the future of the park -

- Historical perspective - Mitch Moore
- Native American perspective - Jim Wilson
- Audubon perspective - Joel Dunnette
- Park Forestry perspective - Jacob Ryg
- Friends of Indian Heights perspective - Barb Hudson
- Dakota perspective - Valerie Guimaraes & Shirley Greising
- Rochester Active Sports Club perspective - Jeff Robertson
- Archeological perspective - Constance Arzigian, PhD.
- MN Conservation Corp perspective - Kyle Martin

The 'Brainstorming Exercise' involved a number of steps. First was the simple process of Steering Committee members sharing thoughts and ideas for the future of the park. Secondly, the group then began to develop descriptive statements for each of the ideas. Finally, the Steering Committee members then independently numerically ranked the ideas. *(We used a process also used by the City Sales Taxes group.)*

The final step was the development of recommendations. Each Steering Committee member was asked to independently develop up to five recommendations. Over a series of meetings duplicates were removed, and through dialogue, discussion & debate each recommendation was developed and presented below for your consideration.

Recommendations to the Park Board Commissioners Regarding Indian Heights Park

- Re-establish and mark the boundaries of Indian Heights Park and identify park entry point(s). Park & Recreation staff, in conjunction with the appropriate city staff and/or outside firms, will identify and mark the park boundaries. 2012

- Complete an ethnographic review of the Park Property. Park & Recreation staff will contract with a professional consulting group to further research & document history and archeological significance of the land on which the park resides, including a park walk through. This review will follow best practice and invite participation by appropriate Native American organizations including the Native American Center of Southeast Minnesota, the Dakota Nation, & other appropriate Native American Communities. (Consideration should be given to using the Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center because this group has visited the park & presented to the Steering Committee during the fact finding phase.) Spring 2012
- Discontinue the use of bicycles in the park in recognition of the park being a Native American sacred site and having limited usable topographic area. Allow other forms of outdoor recreation consistent with a sacred site to continue such as hiking, birding, snowshoeing. Fall 2011
- Design and develop an educational kiosk at the park entrance with the collaboration of appropriate interested community groups. Such a kiosk may include a map of the park outlining the network of maintained trails, identifying park rules, describing the natural environment of the park and informing the community of both the Native American and European history of the site. 2012/2013
- Restore the oak savanna - Indian Heights Park should be maintained to secure and restore its unique environmental qualities and ecological systems to pre-European contact time period. Park & Recreation staff and interested community groups & citizens will develop and carry-out a multi-year plan to restore the oak savannas. 2012 - 2022.
- Recognize in Indian Heights Park the Dakota/Native American historical presence in Southeast MN. Park & Recreation staff will develop options in collaboration with interested Native American groups, interested citizens and community groups. There are models that should serve as a "best practice" models for how sacred sites can exist and be protected on public land - the Oheya-wahi/ Pilot Knob preservation project in Mendota Heights, Minnesota, & Effigy Mounds in Iowa. 2012/2013

Additional Recommendations

- Agree in principle to investigate the development of mountain bike trails in another location in the Rochester Park System such as Gamehaven Reservoir, given we have recommended discontinuing bicycling in IHP. Final agreement will be based on a mapped trail plan and an

environmental review that meets conditions of appropriate agencies, and is acceptable to the Park Board.

- Discharge the Indian Heights Park Steering Committee as they have presented their report and recommendations.

Additional Considerations

In the process of fact finding, brainstorming, and recommendation development the Steering Committee learned & discussed many things. Some of these ideas need to be preserved and noted for future consideration by the staff of the Park & Recreation Department and the Park Board of Commissioners.

- Continue to balance and view parks as a system when considering additions & changes to a specific park.
- When considering a change in a park's use, which will significantly increase patron usage from beyond the intended service area, its regional draw, and/or expand or reduce the scope of current activities, we recommend a best practice approach to soliciting needed information. Where appropriate, best practices include an environmental review, consulting with appropriate neighbors, community, & city stakeholders.

Closing Comment

We came together as a group of citizens with strong views, varied opinions and perspectives regarding Indian Heights Park. The recommendations presented here we make unanimously. We appreciate the opportunity to serve our community.

Attachments

Attachment A - Park History

Attachment B - Meeting Agendas & Minutes

Attachment C - Brainstorming Ideas; Descriptors; & Scoring

Attachment D - Recommendation Development Exercise Documents